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- Today's Insider (PDF)



YOU DON'T SAY...

"What caught my eye when reading the budget was that it was a downtown revitalization grant for an area that I didn't believe had ever been incorporated."

House Democratic Leader Darren Jackson, on a downtown revitalization grant given to a community in western Johnston County that does not govern itself or have a traditional downtown.

THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 7/24/17

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News Summary

Legislative Redistricting

Plaintiffs who successfully challenged the state's legislative districts are asking a federal panel to require lawmakers to draw new maps by August 11, and to hold new elections in March, before the next regularly scheduled legislative session.

Meanwhile, the plaintiffs say state lawmakers lost their authority to pass bills or override vetoes after June 30, when the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that the state's voting districts are unconstitutional went into effect. Those arguments are part of the plaintiff's latest filing in the Covington v N.C. case, scheduled for a hearing Thursday in the U.S. Middle District in Greensboro. The three-judge panel that declared the maps unconstitutional and ordered lawmakers to draw new ones in 2016 will now hear arguments about how quickly the process should happen.

Attorneys representing the state and legislative leaders have proposed a November 15 deadline to pass new state House and Senate districts and submit them to the court for review. They argue that the process is required to include public hearings and feedback.

The Southern Coalition for Social Justice, the plaintiffs' attorneys, submitted a timeline Friday they say would provide adequate time for a new primary election December 5, 2017, and new general elections for legislative seats on March 6th, 2018, reseating lawmakers before they reconvene for the 2018 short session. They say legislators are dragging their feet to try to avoid a special election.

Opponents of Republican legislative leaders have been arguing for months that a legislature elected in part under unconstitutional districts is itself unconstitutional. Earlier this year, state NAACP president Rev. William Barber called on lawmakers to "cease and desist" conducting legislative business until the districts are redrawn and new elections are held. But legislative leaders countered that past legislatures have continued to legislate despite such rulings, pointing to cases in the early 2000s.

In Friday's filings, however, SCSJ lead attorney Anita Earls argues that the circumstances of this case are different because of "the scope of the constitutional violation." More than half the House and Senate districts will have to be redrawn, she argues, so a majority of the body is not constitutionally elected.

Earls says the legislature has the legal right to the first attempt to fix its own maps, and says the federal court can grant it the power to do so. But any other action, she suggests, would be legally dubious. An exhibit filed with the motion offers an example of how that could play out.

The Southern Environmental Law Center's state director Derb Carter a letter he sent last week to Governor Roy Cooper, House Speaker Tim Moore, and Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger, advising the legislators not to try to override Cooper's veto of H576, the "Aerosolization of Leachate" bill.

That bill is one of a half-dozen that lawmakers are expected to reconsider in their veto override session August 3rd. Carter argues, as Earls did in her motion, that the issuance of the U.S. Supreme Court's mandate to the state June 30 removes the body's authority to legislate or override a veto.

"If the usurper legislature does attempt to override the veto," Carter wrote in the letter dated Friday, "it opens itself up to litigation wherein the North Carolina State Courts may be asked to issue a declaratory judgment that the law is facially unconstitutional and void ab initio."

WRAL News asked legislative leaders for their response to this argument. Answering on behalf of Senate Redistricting Chairman Sen. Ralph Hise, R-Mitchell, spokeswoman Shelly Carver replied, "We will respond to the plaintiffs in court at the hearing on Thursday." (Laura Leslie, WRAL NEWS, 7/24/17).

Foxconn Location

Resources: [Tony Copeland interview on UNC-TV's "Bottom Line"](#)

Foxconn Technology Group is still considering North Carolina as a possible location for its new manufacturing facility, N.C. Commerce Secretary Tony Copeland said in a TV interview recorded last Thursday. Copeland, who's been leading the state's economic development efforts since January, told the UNC-TV program "Bottom Line" that he's had talks with the company. News reports have mentioned a number of states in the running for the facility, with the Wall Street Journal reporting Monday that Wisconsin is the leading candidate. Reports say the company plans to employ around 5,000 people.

"It is being considered," Copeland said. "Does anyone know what exactly is going on with this project? No. ... They have been here and we have dealt with them."

Asked if he's personally been in touch with the company, Copeland said "yes." The Associated Press recently reported that seven states are in the running for the Foxconn project, but its list did not include North Carolina. The AP story says the company will "announce plans to develop operations in at least three states by early August."

Copeland also discussed North Carolina's incentives programs during the interview with "Bottom Line." He was critical of a Senate bill proposed this year that would redirect state financial incentives from urban counties to encourage companies to move to poorer counties. Copeland pointed out that 60 to 70 percent of new jobs in the state are located in the Triangle and Charlotte

areas. "It's working -- why would we want to in any way stall the jewel in the crown? We need to do something more robust for the rural areas."

Copeland argued that rural areas need a different incentives program than the JDIG program used to lure major employers in urban counties. JDIG, or Job Development Investment Grant, reimburses companies for a portion of their payroll taxes, but that means the grants take time to pay off for the companies. He says the state should "look at putting more money in the first years" of the corporate expansion during what he called the "valley of death for small companies."

"I'm not saying we give money up front without a performance base and financial viability," he said. "We've got to be willing to perhaps take some of that risk, let people like me assume some of that risk and hold me accountable, and do some of that in those areas."

Copeland also said the state needs to work on improving infrastructure in rural counties, noting that some counties are 40 miles from the nearest natural gas line. "They will never get manufacturing without access to natural gas," he said. "So we talk about rural economic development, but it's not just about incentives."

The commerce secretary was also asked about how the state's public-private partnership, the Economic Development Partnership, is working with the Department of Commerce. Copeland noted that the Commerce Department's budget is down \$32 million from when he worked there 12 years ago. "I would argue that that is a negative, but we'll make it work," he said. "We're not going to fight over the structure of economic development, we're going to make it work." (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 7/25/17).

School Funding

Signaling a new era in a long-running public school lawsuit, the two sides in the landmark Leandro case on Monday requested an independent consultant to suggest additional steps to the state to improve education for all children in North Carolina. The announcement of a joint court motion came on the 20th anniversary of the state Supreme Court's first ruling in the case, when it declared that the State Constitution guarantees every child "an opportunity to receive a sound basic education." After two decades of litigation, the plaintiff school districts and the state agreed to nominate an independent, "non-party" consultant to the court by Oct. 30, or, if they can't agree on one, they'll nominate three possibilities.

If the court concurs, the consultant will work to come up with a specific plan for meeting the court's 2002 mandates in its second Leandro ruling -- a well-trained, competent teacher in every classroom, a well-trained, competent principal in every school and enough resources that every child has an equal opportunity for education. Those mandates were upheld by the state Supreme Court in 2004. It's unclear what influence, if any, the consultant would have in the legislature, which allocates funding for education.

Also, last week, Gov. Roy Cooper signed an executive order creating the Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education. Cooper said "it is far past time for the State to implement comprehensive, inter-disciplinary measures that allocate the resources necessary to ensure that the promise of a sound basic education for children in this State is realized." Commission members will be appointed by the governor. The consultant and the commission would work independently of each other and develop separate reports, according to Monday's proposal to the court. The consultant wouldn't be a member of the commission but could attend meetings and will be given access to the panel's evidence. The consultant would also develop information and could share it with the commission.

The consultant's final recommendations would be due in 12 months, and then the commission would have 45 days to submit its own report. The commission is expected to seek private donations to help pay for the work of both the consultant and the commission. Monday's joint motion marked a turning point in the Leandro case, which began in 1994 when students, parents and school districts in five, low-wealth counties sued the state, claiming that students were being denied educational rights in the North Carolina Constitution.

For years, the court has monitored the state's compliance with the two rulings, holding numerous hearings on education issues. The case has affected state funding and policies, but the court continued to cite severe deficiencies in the state's education system. Melanie Black Dubis, partner with Parker Poe, the lead counsel for the school districts, said Monday's action by both sides represented a huge step forward. (Jane Stancill, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 7/24/17).

Resignation

The N.C. Retirement Systems' chief investment officer has resigned, state treasurer Dale Folwell announced Monday. Kevin SigRist had been hired by Folwell's predecessor, Democrat Janet Cowell, in 2013. He'd previously worked as a pension administrator for the state of Florida. "I was surprised when Mr. SigRist gave me his resignation letter," Folwell said in a news release. "It was not asked for, but I feel confident that we will continue to provide stable management for the pension fund. We will be announcing plans for the department in the very near future." The news release from Folwell did not say why SigRist quit or if he has a new job elsewhere. SigRist is the second major resignation since Folwell took over the treasurer's office. In May, Mona Moon, executive administrator of the State Health Plan, resigned and said she left "because I still believe (Folwell) should fill the role with someone who more closely shares his vision and management style."(THE INSIDER, 7/25/17).

Downtown Grants

An unincorporated community in western Johnston County will receive state money for downtown revitalization this year, although residents aren't sure where their "downtown" is located. North Carolina legislators this summer earmarked \$30,000 for Cleveland, a fast-growing crossroads community of shopping centers and subdivisions that does not govern itself and does not have a traditional downtown. The money surprised Johnston County leaders and residents. They hadn't applied for the money, and so far no one has received direction on what it is meant for or any regulations for its use.

"We've been throwing out ideas -- what about this, what about that," said Kim Lawter, executive director of the Greater Cleveland Chamber of Commerce. "We're all trying to figure out what to do with this money. We don't have a downtown. Where would downtown be? Even that's been a topic of conversation."

Cleveland is one of 75 communities and counties across the state receiving a total of \$5.78 million in one-time funds for downtown revitalization projects. The special allocations were carved out for primarily Republican districts represented by legislators on the House or Senate appropriations committees. The Republican-led General Assembly began allocating funds for specific downtowns in 2015, when it unexpectedly gave \$1.25 million to 13 towns. In 2016, that number rose to \$5.7 million for 31 projects.

Some Democrats have criticized the earmarks as "pork" spending, while Republicans have said the money helps small communities that might have a tough time coming up with enough money to complete large projects. Cleveland, which has a population of about 27,000, has seen dramatic growth over the past two decades as more people have moved to the Triangle. At Interstate 40 and N.C. 42, the area has attracted many people who commute to jobs in Raleigh and Research Triangle Park but enjoy a more rural setting.

Once a farming community, the area is named for the former Cleveland School, which has been turned into a community hub on Cleveland Road with a gymnasium and athletic fields. A branch of Johnston Community College is also there, along with a fire station. Stores and restaurants line N.C. 42. Some leaders have said for years that Cleveland should incorporate as a town so a local governing board instead of the Johnston County Board of Commissioners would be responsible for approving or denying development projects.

"I wish we'd use (the state money) to begin the process of becoming a town," said Jeff Carver, chairman of the Board of Commissioners. "The legislature is going to decide how that will be used later, and all we'll do is follow the exact instruction on what to do with that money." Residents agree incorporation will likely become necessary as the area continues to grow, but some say \$30,000 isn't enough to pay for the kind of project that would make it worthwhile. "We want it, but we don't want the taxes," said Michelle Trajanovska, who lives in the area. "What do you get in the trade-off? If I'm paying more, what am I going to get for it? Sidewalks? A community center? What?"

Without plans to incorporate, it's unclear why the legislature chose Cleveland to receive money for downtown revitalization. Rep. Nelson Dollar, R-Wake, senior chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said legislators asked for specific amounts for certain communities. An accountability system will be in place to ensure the money is used properly, he said. Sen. Brent Jackson, R-Sampson, who represents Johnston and serves on the Senate's appropriations committee, said he

was not involved in drafting this portion of the budget. House Democratic Leader Darren Jackson was critical of the money designated for Cleveland.

Dollar defended the money, adding that the state probably should have informed the communities ahead of time that they were picked to receive funds. "I don't know of any community that doesn't have some sort of project or set of projects that they could use some extra funding for," he said. "I'm sure those counties will work with those communities and be able to put those funds towards the appropriate purposes."

The earmarks sidestep traditional downtown funding programs like North Carolina's Main Street Solution Fund, a competitive grant with rigorous planning and accountability processes, including a requirement that communities come up with a two-to-one funding match. This year, the legislature budgeted \$500,000 for the grants, and last year none at all.

"One of the reasons why the Main Street program is so successful is that you have to show you have commitment, that you have a plan, that there is infrastructure and support in place," said Beth Gargan, assistant secretary of communications for the state Department of Commerce.(Autumn Linford, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 7/24/17).

Running

N.C. Court of Appeals Judge John Arrowood, who was appointed to fill a court vacancy in April, announced Monday that he plans to run for a full term in 2018. Gov. Roy Cooper appointed Arrowood to the seat after Judge Doug McCullough, a Republican who was expected to retire at the end of May, decided to retire early and give Cooper the power to appoint his replacement. McCullough said he resigned early so his departure wouldn't begin the process of shrinking the court from 15 to 12 judges, which is part of a new law proposed by legislative Republicans. Arrowood, a Charlotte Democrat, had previously served on the court from 2007 to 2008. "As a candidate for Court of Appeals judge I make this promise: if elected I will work hard and will render justice fairly and impartially without favoritism to any party or to the state," Arrowood said in a news release Monday.(THE INSIDER, 7/25/17).

Black Caucus

For African-American state lawmakers and their constituents, court-ordered redistricting is a double-edged sword. New maps could make some lopsided legislative districts more competitive, threatening Republicans' veto-proof majority in the General Assembly. But they also could reduce the concentration of black voters and pit incumbent legislators against each other if their districts are merged.

"They could choose to redraw the districts so that they double-bunk us with Republicans, and that will knock us out," said Sen. Erica Smith-Ingram, D-Northampton. The N.C. Legislative Black Caucus members representing eastern North Carolina held a Sunday afternoon town hall meeting at Wilson Community College's Frank Eagles Community Business Center to field questions and offer updates on voter identification, redistricting and the 2017 state budget.

Sen. Angela Bryant, D-Nash, and Rep. Jean Farmer-Butterfield, D-Wilson, hosted the meeting for their constituents along with Smith-Ingram, Rep. Shelly Willingham, D-Edgecombe, and Sen. Don Davis, D-Greene. Caucus members said redistricting should still be a net positive for Democrats. While the caucus is officially nonpartisan, its members stressed the necessity of new maps after the U.S. Supreme Court agreed last month that GOP legislative leaders drew gerrymandered districts that were unconstitutionally carved along racial lines.

"We feel like after the redrawing of the districts, we will be able to break the supermajority, and I think that's one of our major tasks right now," said Willingham. "We're not going to be able to get a majority in the House, but we feel like we have a much better chance of breaking that supermajority, and this will put us at the negotiating table now that we have a Democratic governor."

It remains unclear whether the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals will order a special election in 2017. A panel of appellate judges initially called for off-year voting under new district maps, but the Supreme Court found a lack of support for that extraordinary step in the lower court ruling and remanded it for further consideration.

Farmer-Butterfield and Willingham have both been named to a joint redistricting committee scheduled to meet this week. "I can tell you that they do not listen to us when they are in the

majority, so those lines will be drawn pretty much based on what the Republican leadership, who is the majority party, wants, and they probably already have them ready," Farmer-Butterfield said.

Smith-Ingram called for compact legislative districts based on groupings of communities that are already linked by county lines, major highways and similar economic interests. "It's a 2 hour and 41 minute drive for me to get from where I live in Northampton County to the easternmost point in my district geographically," she said. "That is a huge geographic area that takes a lot of finances to be able to serve and represent."

While the new districts could erode Republicans' partisan advantage, Smith-Ingram acknowledged that dispersing black voters and double-bunking Democrats also could reduce the number of African-American state lawmakers. "You will be able to elect candidates of your choice, but they won't always look like you," she said.

Former Gov. Jim Hunt, who attended the Sunday town hall with his wife, Carolyn, called North Carolina's legislative redistricting process "the most crucial thing going on in America today."

"If we get these new constitutional districts, good ones, fair ones, we're going to see our legislators here today in the chairmanships in the Senate and the House that they don't have a chance for now," Hunt said. "These would be great leaders right here, and I know it. I look forward to calling you Mr. Chairman, Ms. Chairman."(Corey Friedman, THE WILSON TIMES, 7/23/17).

Water Quality

The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality will deny Chemours' permission to discharge any GenX into the Cape Fear River while state officials ask the N.C. General Assembly to restore some of the funding and staffing cuts previously made to state environmental programs, Gov. Roy Cooper said Monday morning.

Those were some of the steps the governor announced Monday during a visit to Wilmington to meet with local officials -- his first appearance in the region since the chemical's presence in area public drinking supplies was reported in early June. "I want to make it clear today that the Department of Environmental Quality is going to deny Chemours' request and to deny their permit to release GenX into the river," Cooper said. His visit came 47 days after the Star-News reported that Chemours, a spin-off of chemical giant DuPont, had been discharging the unregulated chemical compound GenX into the Cape Fear River. The Cape Fear Public Utility Authority (CFPUA) cannot filter the chemical, which has been detected in drinking water in Southeastern North Carolina. The company has since said it has voluntarily stopped discharging GenX into the river. The denial of Chemours' permit to discharge the chemical was one of several steps Cooper said his administration has taken or will be taking in response to GenX, including asking legislators to fund what DEQ Secretary Michael Regan said was nearly \$3 million to restore previous cuts, hire additional scientists and perform additional testing of the water. The DEQ has been the target of repeated funding and staffing cuts since 2011, resulting in a growing backlog in permitting and enforcement.

The actions announced Monday came three days after N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein said his office has sent Chemours an investigative demand into whether Chemours used deceptive trade practices while marketing GenX. The governor said he has also asked the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation to determine if a criminal investigation is warranted and asked the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct a public health assessment on the long-term effects of GenX and other compounds.

Members of the region's state legislative delegation said they planned to support Cooper's initiatives, but wanted to see details. Rep. Ted Davis, R-New Hanover, said he would bring those requests to House Speaker Tim Moore and other House leaders to "support the necessary emergency legislative appropriation to get the state what it needs to protect our citizens with safe drinking water."

Rep. Holly Grange, R-New Hanover, said she wants to make sure that the requests from DEQ and other state agencies would be effective. "I think it's realistic," she said. "But I think he needs to realize we're not going to just throw money at the problem."

During Monday morning's press conference, Cooper and his staff said repeatedly that GenX is not their only concern, given that other emerging chemical compounds also are in the water. Mandy

Cohen, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, said residents should be "comfortable with drinking the water," though she said agencies and researchers would continue to compile more data.(Tim Buckland, THE WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS, 7/24/17).

Charlotte City Council

Half of those attending Monday's Charlotte City Council meeting carried "Trump-Pence" signs, and waved small American flags. The other half held small handmade blue signs that said, "Fake News: Charlotte Supports Trump" and "Sexism isn't a Charlotte Value." The two sides re-fought the 2016 presidential election after City Council member Dimple Ajmera said on a television show last week that Trump voters shouldn't be on City Council or in the mayor's race – controversial comments that she has backed repeatedly. Last week on the WCNC show "Flashpoint," Ajmera said, "Republicans that are supporting Trump, they should have no place on City Council whatsoever or in the mayor's race."

Before Monday's meeting, Ajmera called a news conference to read a statement about her comments, but she declined to answer questions from reporters. In her statement, she said that her "remarks on Trump were never to make this about a political party. Instead it remains about morals and principles, which includes standing up to Trump's disrespect, disregard and dangerous rhetoric towards women, minorities, immigrants, disabled and the poor." She said she started the conversation about "Trump's values," and said, "I want to be the one to end it with a call to action for unity, mutual respect, care and regard for our neighbors as we tackle very important issues of safety, trust and equity."

Trump voter James Tatro said he disagrees that Trump stands for hate or xenophobia. But he said he wouldn't have protested if Ajmera had assigned those values to the president and said those values had no place in city government. Her targeting of all Trump voters crossed a line, he said. "I'm extremely disappointed," he said. "In a city with such a wide range of beliefs, we had 100,000 Charlotteans who voted for the president. To say we have no place in city government is infuriating." Ajmera, a Democrat who came to the U.S. from India in high school, was appointed to the council in January to replace John Autry, who left council to join the North Carolina General Assembly. Before being appointed, she had no experience in local government.(Steve Harrison, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 7/24/17).

Well Recommendations

The EPA requires public water systems to monitor their drinking supplies frequently and limit the amounts of the contaminants that the federal government regulates. But people who own their wells shoulder all that responsibility themselves, whether or not they know it. Now government and academic public health experts, including Crystal Lee Pow Jackson from the Department of Health and Human Services, are taking new steps to help them. Jackson, an environmental toxicologist, faces big obstacles in her quest to map the locations of a plentitude of private drinking wells spread across North Carolina.

One third of the state's residents, some 3.3 million people, are believed to draw drinking water from wells, a tally second only to Pennsylvania nationwide. But North Carolina didn't require testing water from newly dug private wells until 2008. Records of the now-required screens don't always include an address, a data point vital to Jackson's map building. And the many owners of older wells who never had their water tested have no paper trail for her to follow either.

Still, any filling in of blanks could help state and county public health experts like her improve their understanding of where wells are and what contamination risks lurk nearby. "We can at least identify areas where more people are likely to have wells rather than public drinking water," said Jackson, whose well mapping and education project within the state Division of Public Health is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Jacqueline MacDonald Gibson, a UNC-Chapel Hill researcher, co-authored a research paper published this month promoting specific steps needed to promote better testing and treatment of well water in North Carolina. The steps were developed at a 2015 Environmental Health Collaborative summit attended by a mix of drinking water supply and public health experts.

While there is no evidence that the vast majority of private wells in this state are tainted, there is plenty of evidence that some are at risk, from natural and human-made contaminants. Using 2007-2013 data from North Carolina emergency departments, Gibson concluded in research

published last year that 99 percent of 29,400 emergency department visits over a seven year period for acute gastrointestinal illness -- vomiting, diarrhea and the like -- linked to drinking water were associated with contamination in private wells, not public water supplies. In a 2014 report requested by the General Assembly, DHHS legislative counsel Adam Sholar, working for former Secretary Aldona Wos, recommended against reducing or waiving state laboratory fees for tests on behalf of families with incomes at or below 300 percent of federal poverty level, saying that would require the state to commit more money to the laboratory. Racial disparities are in play in this environmental issue, Gibson said. Unequal access to safer public drinking water supplies has left some African-American residents living very close to municipalities, sometimes surrounded by a land that is part of a city or town, but unlinked to nearby public water pipes.

About 30 percent of 171 private well water samples Gibson's research team gathered tested positive for coliform bacteria, which can cause diarrhea and vomiting; more than 6 percent tested positive for E. coli. Results for both contaminants were only a fraction of a percent in samples taken from the nearby public water.(Catherine Clabby, NC HEALTH NEWS, 7/24/17).

Congressional Budget

Conservative hard-liners in the House are hoping to gut the Congressional Budget Office, the nonpartisan scorekeeper whose analysis has recently bedeviled Republican efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, by amending a massive spending bill set to be debated later this week. An amendment filed Monday by Rep. H. Morgan Griffith (R-Va.) would eliminate the agency's Budget Analysis Division, cutting 89 jobs and \$15 million of the CBO's proposed \$48.5 million budget. A separate amendment filed by Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) would also eliminate the same division and specify that the CBO instead evaluate legislation "by facilitating and assimilating scoring data" compiled by four private think tanks -- the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, and the Urban Institute.

Both Griffith and Meadows are members of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, but complaints about the CBO have been widespread among Republicans in recent months after the agency found that various iterations of the party's health-care legislation would result in an increase of more than 20 million uninsured Americans over the coming decade. Critics have attacked the CBO's analysis and pointed to its projections on the Affordable Care Act as evidence that the office, now led by a Republican-selected director, cannot be trusted to accurately analyze complex legislation. The criticism compelled the eight former directors of the CBO, which was created in 1974, to sign a letter Friday objecting to "recent attacks on the integrity and professionalism of the agency and on the agency's role in the legislative process." But conservatives say the CBO's scorekeeping function is best left to other outlets. "They're the one group that makes a weatherman's 10-day forecast look accurate," said Meadows, the Freedom Caucus chairman, during a Monday appearance at the National Press Club.(Mike DeBonis, THE WASHINGTON POST, 7/24/17).

Brunch Adjustments

At Killingtons Restaurant and Pub in Huntersville, they've adjusted their hours since the "brunch bill" that allows Sunday morning alcohol sales passed. At Block Bistro, they're seeing a second earlier brunch rush at 10 a.m. Sundays. And at a third Huntersville restaurant, Red Rocks Cafe, is already making changes for future Mother's Day and Father's Day brunches.

Huntersville was among the first in North Carolina to allow the Sunday morning alcohol sales after the North Carolina legislature passed the so-called "brunch bill" last month. The brunch bill allows cities and counties to pass local ordinances allowing Sunday alcohol sales at 10 a.m. rather than noon. Retail stores and grocery stores are also allowed to sell alcohol Sunday morning.

Huntersville and unincorporated Mecklenburg County are the only areas that have passed local ordinances so far.

Brian Bruce, executive chef at Killingtons Restaurant and Pub, said they adjusted their hours to open earlier once the bill passed. They have put up posters and other advertisements to bring in more customers on Sunday morning. Bruce said last Sunday, they had \$500 worth of alcohol sales before noon. Red Rocks Cafe in Birkdale Village sold \$200 worth of alcohol one Sunday morning after the brunch bill passed, said owner Ron Herbert.

"It was the time to change," Herbert said. He said it was a good move on behalf of legislators. Cafe 100 in Huntersville usually had a rush at noon on Sunday, but Assistant Manager Lissa Hawksley said since the bill passed, the restaurant sees another rush at 10 a.m. She said Cafe 100 is selling more alcohol than before, making the cost per person rise and increasing revenue for the business.(Jamie Gwaltney, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 7/24/17).

Highway Lights

A new investment in the roadway light fixtures on North Carolina's major interstates and highways will greatly improve motorists' nighttime visibility, according to the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The \$30.8 million contract awarded by the NCDOT will allow for the upgrades of more than 10,600 roadway light fixtures at more than 350 locations across the state. The plan includes interstates such as I-95, I-40, I-77 and I-85, as well as I-440, I-540 and the Triangle Expressway in the Raleigh-Durham area, I-485 and I-277 in Charlotte, I-73/74 in the Triad, and I-240 and I-26 around Asheville.

Several non-interstate highways around the state will also see lighting improvements. The contract also calls for upgrading more than 12,000 building lights, including those at rest stops and visitor centers around the state, in addition to weigh stations and county maintenance facilities. Officials assert that the new, longer-lasting LED lights will save the state money, resulting in more than \$56 million in reduced electrical and maintenance costs over 15 years. The project includes the installation of a lighting and control system that support the maintenance of the lights and save and measure energy usage and lower costs. Construction work is scheduled to start in September of 2017, with the initial locations still being determined. The light and equipment installation should wrap up in November 2018.(WRAL NEWS, 7/24/17).

State Park

The Sampson County Board of Commissioners has thrown its support behind N.C. House Bill 353 and the creation of Black River State Park, so people can "enjoy this natural resource, promote tourism and economic growth," even while some local residents have raised concerns about the legislation. House Bill 353 authorizes the creation of a state park on the Black River, home to some of the oldest trees in the world. Its bald cypress trees are more than 1,600 years old. HB353 was ratified in the 2017 legislation session, directing the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to study the feasibility and desirability of the establishment of a state park on the Black River in Sampson County and an assessment of actions the state could take to improve the navigability of the river.

Following approval from the Senate on June 28, the bill was placed on the House's calendar for the next day, June 29, at which point it was passed and presented to Gov. Roy Cooper for final approval. The county board unanimously approved a consent agenda this month that included a resolution in support of the creation of Black River State Park.

A strategic plan commissioned by the Sampson County Convention and Visitors Bureau identifies South River, Black River, the Coharie and Six Runs Creeks as significant waterway assets for the county, but notes that there were few ways for visitors to engage with the waterways given limited public access, put-ins and options for use by non-boaters, county officials said in support of the bill.

Representatives from The Nature Conservancy and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation hosted an information session in Ivanhoe in May to discuss the proposed Black River State Park. Carol Tingley, deputy director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, led the discussion. Supporters pointed to perceived benefits in tourism and commerce for southern Sampson County, while opponents -- many of them in attendance at the May meeting -- have expressed how increased traffic and needed maintenance of the river would adversely impact the environment. They were also upset about officials not having a public meeting before the bill was introduced.

The park will be situated on the banks of the river, similar to the Lumber River State Park, according to the Conservancy. The goal is to provide boating access, which will provide a view of the historic trees. According to the bill, the state may receive donations of appropriate land and may purchase other needed areas for the parks with existing funds in the Clean Water

Management Trust Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the federal Land and Water Trust Fund and other sources.

In addition to Black River, the bill includes the development of three other state parks: Bob's Pocket State Natural Area in McDowell County; Warwick Mill Bay in Robeson County; and Salmon Creek State Natural Area in Bertie County, which covers the Native American occupation site containing prehistoric and historic archaeological sites.(Chris Berendt, THE SAMPSON INDEPENDENT, 7/24/17).

Davidson Co. Jobs

One of the biggest economic development projects in Triad history was announced Monday as an Austrian furniture and flooring industry supplier committed to a \$700 million project in Davidson County. Egger Wood Products, based in St. Johann in Tirol, said it would eventually create up to 770 advanced production and other jobs. The first phase, however, will include 440 jobs and a \$300 million investment. The particle-board plant project is estimated to require three phases and 15 years to complete. Egger supplies wood-based materials for the global furniture, wood construction and the flooring industries.

The project would be the first large development in the county-owned I-85 Corporate Center near Linwood. The average Egger salary would be \$40,000, according to the Davidson Economic Development Commission. The county's average annual wage is \$36,836.

"Having our own production facility in North America is vital for Egger to tap into the market and become a significant player for the growing demand in the U.S. for wood-based materials," said Walter Schiegl, the company's chief technology officer and member of its executive board. Egger plans to build more than 4.5 million square feet of production space on a more than 200 acres in the industrial park.

To put the Egger project into context, Ashley Furniture Industries Inc. has a 3.8 million-square-foot facility in Advance, its largest plant overall, where it has spent more than \$250 million and created more than 1,120 jobs. Ashley, the largest U.S. home furnishings manufacturer and retailer, has pledged to reach at least 1,650 jobs at the facility. "North Carolina's legacy as a top state for furniture manufacturing and the availability of a skilled labor force is an excellent advantage for Egger's first entry into the U.S. market," Gov. Roy Cooper said in a statement. The project is likely to receive a state Job Development Investment Grant and local incentives, which were not disclosed in the joint statement. It has qualified for a \$1 million grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation that will be used for sewer infrastructure at the location. The Egger project is expected to receive assistance from Duke Energy, Norfolk Southern, the state Community College System, state departments of Environmental Quality and Transportation, and N.C. Railroad.(Richard Craver, THE WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL, 7/24/17).

Legislative Studies and Meetings

Items in **Bold** are new listings.

LB: Legislative Building

LOB: Legislative Office Building.

More Information: <http://ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/>

Wednesday, July 26

- 1:30 p.m. | House Select Committee on Redistricting, 643 LOB.

Thursday, Aug. 3

- Noon | House convenes in session.
- Noon | Senate convenes in session.

Friday, Aug. 4

- 11:30 a.m. | Rep. Rosa Gill -- Press Conference, Press Room LB.

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

Items in **BOLD** are new listings.

Tuesday, July 25

- 9 a.m. | The N.C. Code Officials Qualification Board holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, 1st Floor Hearing Room, Room 131 (Albemarle Building), 325 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.
- 1 p.m. | The Board Development Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, 1100 Wake Forest Road, Raleigh. Contact: Yvonne Huntley, [919-821-9573](tel:919-821-9573).

Wednesday, July 26

- 9 a.m. | The Wildlife Resource Commission committees meet, Commission Room, 5th Floor, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Thursday, July 27

- 9 a.m. | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, WRC Centennial Campus, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Monday, July 31

- 12 p.m. | The N.C. State Board of Elections hold public hearing on proposed rule changes, State Board of Elections Office, 441 N. Harrington St., Raleigh.

Tuesday, Aug. 1

- 12 p.m. | The UNC Board of Governors' Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs, Board Room of the Center for School Leadership Development, 140 Friday Center Dr., Chapel Hill. Contact: Josh Ellis, [919-962-4629](tel:919-962-4629).

Thursday, Aug. 3

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).

Wednesday, Aug. 16

- 10:30 a.m. | The Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Wake Technical Community College-Public Safety Training Center, 321 Chapanoke Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Aug. 17

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Sept. 13

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 14

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 21

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 28

- 10:30 a.m. | The Standard Commercial Fishing License Eligibility Board to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries meets, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Wilmington District Office, 127 North Cardinal Dr. Extension, Wilmington.

Thursday, Oct. 5

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).
- TBD | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, WRC Centennial Campus, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Thursday, Oct. 19

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Nov. 8

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Nov. 9

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Nov. 16

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Dec. 7

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).
- TBD | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Thursday, Dec. 21

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Jan. 10

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Jan. 11

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality

The N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources has a new name - the N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality. More Information: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/guest/home>

Tuesday, July 18

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Water Resources hold public meeting on Atlantic Coast Pipeline Water Quality Certification, Fayetteville Technical Community College Cumberland Hall Auditorium at 2201 Hull Rd., Fayetteville.

Thursday, July 20

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Water Resources hold public meeting on Atlantic Coast Pipeline Water Quality Certification, Nash Community College Brown Auditorium at 522 N. Old Carriage Road, Rocky Mount.

Thursday, Aug. 3

- 2 p.m. | The state Department on Air Quality holds public hearing concerning incorporation of 2015 Ozone Ambient Standard and Readoption, 2145 Suttle Ave., Charlotte.

N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule

Dobbs Building
430 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina

More Information: <http://www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/activities/activit.htm>

Monday, July 31

- Staff Conference

Monday, Aug. 7

- Staff Conference

Monday, Aug. 14

- Staff Conference

Monday, Aug. 21

- Staff Conference

Monday, Aug. 28

- Staff Conference

UNC Board of Governors

Board Room of the UNC Center for School Leadership Development
140 Friday Center Drive, Chapel Hill (**remote meeting locations in BOLD**)
More Information: <https://www.northcarolina.edu/bog/schedule.php>

Tuesday, Aug. 1

- 12 p.m. | The Board of Governors' Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs, Board Room of the Center for School Leadership Development, 140 Friday Center Dr., Chapel Hill.

Friday, Sept. 8

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Nov. 3

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Dec. 15

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Jan. 26, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, March 23, 2018

- TBA | UNC Wilmington, Wilmington.

Friday, May 25, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Other Meetings and Events of Interest

Items in **BOLD** are new listings.

Tuesday, July 25

- 2:30 p.m. | **Gov. Roy Cooper to sign Senate Bill 55 into law, Lakeforest Elementary School, 3300 Briarcliff Dr, Greenville.**

Sunday, July 30

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association host 81st Annual NC School of Banking, William & Ida Friday Center, UNC-Chapel Hill. The conference concludes on Aug. 4.

Monday, Aug. 14

- No time given | U.S. Small Business Administration deadline for businesses, private nonprofit organizations, homeowners, and renters in North Carolina to submit disaster loan applications for damages caused by the severe storms on May 30.

Friday, Sept. 8

- No Time Given | The 77th Annual National Folk Festival opens in Downtown Greensboro for its third year in the state. Contact: Kaitlin Smith, [336-373-7523, ext 246](#).

Sunday, Sept. 24

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association hold Young Bankers Conference, Crowne Plaza Asheville Resort, Asheville.

Wednesday, Oct. 11

- 10 a.m. | The Carolinas Air Pollution Control Association hold Technical Workshop and Forum, Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, 10000 Beach Club Dr., Myrtle Beach.

Monday, Nov. 6

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association hold Women in Banking Conference, Renaissance Charlotte Southpark, 5501 Carnegie Blvd., Charlotte.

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